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ABSTRACT

This book explores the history of sports programs at federally operated boarding schools for Native Americans. The focus is on students who did not go on to greater athletic glory but who found in sports something otherwise denied them by the boarding school program: a sense of community, accomplishment, and dignity. The first two chapters explore the emergence of high-profile sports programs at the Carlisle and Haskell schools. Sports helped to justify and promote the educational mission of boarding schools by displaying Native Americans behaving and competing in a manner that was contained, civilized, and restrained. Yet such publicity also created controversy, for it contradicted these same goals by appealing to desires and passions that the public enjoyed in sports and popular culture and generally associated with Native Americans. These tensions reveal that sports were a cultural form that could elicit a variety of interpretations even within dominant cultural contexts. The final three chapters explore how students were able to take advantage of this ideological incoherence and through sports experience pride, pleasure, and the creative formation of identity. A chapter on female physical fitness describes how schools discouraged females from playing competitive athletics. Instead, they promoted passivity, sexual restraint, and domestic femininity by emphasizing indoor activity and light exercise. Chapter 5 presents recollections by former students describing the importance of competitive sport in their lives. (Contains 120 references, photographs, notes, and an index.) (TD)

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